

Chilocco Survivors: Contested Discourses in Narrative Responses to Ponca Alcohol Abuse

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ABSTRACT

ERICA A. SCOTT: Chilocco Survivors: Contested Discourses in Narrative Responses to
Ponca Alcohol Abuse
(Under the direction of Michele Rivkin-Fish)

This paper discusses the effects of the Chilocco Indian School boarding school experience on members of the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma through the lens of attitudes towards alcohol use and abuse. I argue that narrative storytelling reveals conflicting discourses that grapple with whether derivation of the Chilocco ideology of personal responsibility for alcohol is acceptable or beneficial. Drawing on Singer et al (1992) and Spicer (1997, 2006), I utilize an analytical framework that links the realities of political economy with the effects of communal transmission of historical trauma across generations. I argue that contestation illustrates that Ogbu's (1990, 1992) theory of cultural inversion is not wholly applicable. Some alumnae find the American ideal of personal responsibility useful; others disparage the application of personal responsibility to alcohol abuse as another American attack. I conclude that both approaches are politically motivated acts aimed at eliminating alcohol abuse.

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CHAPTER 1

Education and Alcohol: An Introduction to the Ponca Tribe and Chilocco Indian School

Members of the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma who attended Chilocco Indian School, a federally run boarding school operating in north central Oklahoma from 1884 to 1980, are divided on the school's contemporary impact. This paper discusses two specific discourses on the aftermath of Chilocco; one highlights how a specific topic of instruction at Chilocco—personal responsibility—is taken up and applied to consumption of alcohol, while the other summarily rejects any comportment idea stemming from Chilocco as a “white”, inappropriate practice. I begin by noting the common theme of individual responsibility for alcohol consumption that many Ponca alumnae in their fifties to sixties advance in their families and community. I trace how this idea emerged from the highly regimented boarding school environment from which students fashioned a “survivor” subjectivity, and I concentrate on how alumnae narratives of Chilocco stress personal pride in individual responsibility and encourage other Poncas to consume alcohol in moderation. This active response to what most Poncas describe as a major health problem shows that ultimately, many women believe the American ideal of individual responsibility positively addresses a Ponca community health issue.

Then, I contrast this viewpoint with a nuanced discussion of an alternative viewpoint common among many Ponca Chilocco male alumni of the same generation and younger Poncas of both genders. Their alternate explanation for alcohol abuse connects educational removal to Chilocco as a violent experience that interrupted Ponca familial inculcation of

safe drinking norms as a result of educational removal. These people vehemently rejected the tome of personal responsibility due to its Chilocco derivation. People in this group were not as uniform as in the first group; often, younger people in their twenties and thirties reflected on how their stints at Chilocco or other boarding schools influenced them, but their narratives focused on their perceptions of parents' or grandparents' Chilocco experiences.

To make sense of how two groups both rely on Chilocco as evidence to support their discourses, I discuss how anthropologists of both alcohol and Indian education both emphasize how sociohistorical events act as determinants of political economy and educational experience that influence contemporary Ponca views on the source and solutions to alcohol abuse. Guided by theoretical insight from Singer (1992) and Spicer (1998), I link anthropologies of alcoholism and the educational experience of American Indians to demonstrate how the dual Ponca discourses indicating the formation of a "survivor" subjectivity and the rejection of Chilocco ideology provide an important critique of Ogbu's (1998) conceptualization of American Indian boarding school cultural inversion and highlight two of the multiplicities of the boarding school legacy in the Ponca community.

Methodology

This research is the result of a melding of my professional interest in alcohol abuse and personal connections with the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma. During the Summer of 2005, I lived and worked in Tulsa, Oklahoma in an outpatient substance abuse clinic and counseling center. I had the fortuitous position of working in a clinic staffed primarily by American Indians, who actively tried to bridge the conventional disease model of addiction etiology with tribal methods of healing and counseling. While staying in the Ponca tribal

headquarters of White Eagle, Oklahoma, I realized that the prevalent alcohol abuse I witnessed was about more than chemical addiction; two main discourses emerged. Yet, I could not understand why the various debates about the source of alcohol abuse and potential remedies seemed to inevitably circle back to the Chilocco Indian School. I was frustrated that I seemed to be missing a key piece of the understanding of alcohol abuse in White Eagle, a piece which Poncas on both sides of the ideological divide used to justify their views.

In order to understand the discussions about alcohol abuse, I conducted four months of participant-observation in the Summer of 2005 and November 2005¹ and interviewed a total of twenty one people currently in their early twenties to late sixties². My arrival in the community as a newcomer, a member of an “off tribe” as I was referred to, generated a buzz in the tight community. I started by interviewing close friends, and as word of my research spread, I identified more consultants. Many were emphatic in their views and eager to talk. Interviews were conducted in English, with Ponca words occasionally sprinkled into the dialogue and then quickly defined. My relationships within White Eagle helped me establish a frank, culturally appropriate rapport as a Lenape person instead of an outsider. To ritually signal appreciation of and respect for consultants, I offered sacred tobacco after interviews, an exchange common throughout Indian Country; this practice of sacred tobacco exchange is traditional among the majority of tribes. Sacred tobacco exchange, in my opinion, helps to

¹ This research was conducted for a senior honors thesis entitled “Handling Yourself” and Alcohol: Narratives of Historical Trauma and Contemporary Alcohol Abuse in an Oklahoma Indian Tribe” overseen by Dr. Arthur Kleinman and Dr. Rubie Watson and presented to the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University. This thesis project analyzed meanings of alcohol abuse among the Ponca Tribe, presented an overview of treatment options, and argued for a health policy recommendation to include alternate meanings of alcoholism in biomedical treatment programs. I acknowledge the difficulty of re-analyzing undergraduate data, and I am certain that my future ethnographic research will bring to light new questions and issues that have been informed by my graduate training.

² All names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the personal identities of the Poncas mentioned in this paper. Consultants chose their own pseudonyms.

reduce the power dynamic inherent in an interview; second, I was able to position myself in the community as a fellow Indian instead of an outsider with whom my informants may have been reticent in sharing their often extremely personal stories. Although I attempted to identify consultants of varied educational and socioeconomic backgrounds to better represent the Chilocco experience, I admit that the overwhelming majority of Poncas living in White Eagle are unemployed and have not achieved a high school diploma or GED. Poncas in White Eagle are also more likely to be of majority Ponca heritage, unlike other tribal members living in nearby, larger towns who may possess more diverse heritages, educational experiences, and employment statuses. Through this ethnography of a small, relatively insular community, I endeavor to include a population of people that are extremely underrepresented in academic research.

I am extremely honored that people shared their thoughts and stories with me, thankful for the frank, open conversations that constantly challenged my thinking about alcohol abuse, and appreciative of their insights that deepened my understanding of boarding school experiences and its intergenerational legacies. I attempt to provide a thoughtful analysis that neither essentializes the unique facets of each consultant's experience, nor memorializes Poncas into a static, ethnographic "fact." At the heart of my analysis is the conclusion that Poncas actively struggle and contest different discourses as a means of ensuring continual existence as a tribal nation. Further research is likely to reveal further modifications and new, emergent discursive models, as people continue to consider how to build a healthy and prosperous tribal community.

CHAPTER TWO

Anthropological Understandings of American Indians and of Alcohol

I initially intended to focus exclusively on Ponca ideas about alcoholism etiology and treatment, but Poncas constantly described sociohistorical factors, notably their Chilocco experiences, as intricately connected to their views on alcohol use versus abuse. Beatrice Medicine, the late eminent Indian anthropologist, argues that alcohol abuse presents the opportunity to develop new coping methods, and the skills learned to handle alcohol reflect a process of self-actualization and the construction of personal autonomy (2006). Erica Prussing's work on narratives of Northern Cheyenne women's sobriety agrees that that "multiple discourses for representing self and self-transformation are evident in ongoing local debates about definitions of both substance abuse and sobriety", making alcohol an interesting and important nexus around which to analyze the creation of subjectivities in the wake of Chilocco experiences (2007:355). As my Ponca consultants insisted, my analysis of alcohol abuse discourses and subjectivities takes into account the Ponca political economy and Chilocco history. The next section engages with major anthropological theories of alcohol abuse and highlights connections to political economy with the aim of providing a framework for a subsequent discussion of Ponca history and political economy.

In his landmark article "Toward a Political-Economy of Alcoholism: The Missing Link in the Anthropology of Drinking" (1986), Merrill Singer argues that anthropology has paid little attention to global political and economic forces that influence social relations and

drinking practices. His later works respond to his pleas for critical medical anthropology studies of alcohol abuse that center on the political economy of the particular research context. Proposing that “the holistic model of critical medical anthropology advances our understanding beyond narrow psychologistic or other approaches commonly employed in social scientific alcohol research”, Singer, et al suggest that analysis of a health concern must consider the influence of larger social and political forces (Singer et al 1992:288). They dispute the frequent biomedical reductionism of alcohol abuse to the conventional disease etiology of alcoholism, an explanatory model that largely ignores the complex interplay of psychological, sociological, and biomedical aspects of the disease in favor of individual pathology of chemical addiction to alcohol. Singer, et al strongly counter the biomedical supremacy of the conventional disease model. They challenge the universal applicability of this ideology, because it too emerged from a specific political and economic context; thus, they argue that any critical medical anthropology analysis of drinking must consider broader political, economic, and historical contexts (1992:289).

Singer, et al (1992) use a medical anthropology framework to relates social factors, particularly the impact of unemployment, with changing drinking patterns and evolving motivations for alcohol consumption. Their article about Juan García, a member of a Puerto Rican immigrant community in Connecticut, eloquently demonstrates how a critical medical anthropological analysis of political economy best analyzes and makes sense of Juan’s health, social, and political constraints. They begin with a historical analysis linking the consumption of alcohol in Puerto Rico with the collapse of the yeoman farmer prompted by the emergence of capitalism. When many Puerto Rican men shifted employment from the self-producing mode of yeoman farming to work in factories, alcohol consumption with co-

workers became a noted public symbol of amassed capital from wage labor outside of the home. It also provided a space for male socialization after work. Subsequent Puerto Rican immigration to Northeastern cities like Hartford altered the economic landscape and the social consumption of alcohol, because men often encountered high unemployment rates in their new cities of residence. Unable to find work or to return to a farming lifestyle in urban metropolises, Puerto Rican male motivation for alcohol consumption shifted with the economic change. Faced with chronic unemployment, many men bemoaned a sense of powerlessness, so they turned to cheap alcohol to deal with their perceived failure as men. When employment was plentiful, drinking remained controlled; long term unemployment, however, prompted destructive drinking stemming from the “consequent sense of worthlessness and failure in men geared to defining masculinity in terms of being *un buen proveedor*” [a good provider] (Singer et al 1992:294).

Even though the conventional disease model of alcoholism would only attribute the death of men like Juan to the biomedical disease of alcoholism, Singer, et al adroitly describe how consumption of alcohol is not the sole contributing factor to alcoholism. On the contrary, the political situation that stimulated Puerto Rican immigration and the economic stagnation in their new Northeastern hometowns resulted in a form of “economic subordination” that facilitated destructive drinking as a means of asserting the masculinity hindered by the economy (1992:295). When the previous economic model that rewarded male labor with social drinking failed, Puerto Rican men turned to alcohol to regain a sense of manliness in a world of unemployment. Juan’s drinking “loses the bewildering quality commonly attached to destructive behavior [through] an examination of symbolic,

environmental, and psychological factors, but does not reduce analysis to any of these factors” (1992:298). Instead, a holistic model that carefully considers the interrelatedness of these factors emerges.

Scholars of alcohol abuse in the anthropology of Native North America concur with Singer’s critical medical anthropological perspective (Kunitz & Levy 1994, 2000; Prussing 2008; Quintero 2000, 2002). Theresa DeLeane O’Neill’s work on the Flathead Reservation asserts that any anthropological study of Indian drinking needs to be “constituted within a cultural value-system that defines it according to developmental and gender-specific parameters”, specifically because perceptions of normal alcohol use versus pathological alcohol abuse or addiction are “both culturally patterned” (1994:576).

Paul Spicer, a leading figure in the medical anthropology of Indian drinking, also uses a theoretical framework integrating political economy and history to investigate the meanings of intoxication, sobriety, and drinking among Indians in Minneapolis and an unnamed Northern Plains tribe. *Toward a (Dys)functional Anthropology of Drinking: Ambivalence and the American Indian Experience with Alcohol* (1997) reached the provocative conclusion that both current drinkers and abstainers uniformly admitted that drinking causes many negative problems, in the realms of society and health. Nonetheless, Indians failed to uniformly condemn drinking; some disparaged alcohol as a foreign, European influence, while others contended that its use has been incorporated into tribal values, such as sharing and family gathering. Seeking to construct a theory of Indian drinking that accounts for the complex, paradoxical nature of Indian experiences with drinking, he uses the term “(dys)functional anthropology” to illustrate the diverse, often contradictory narratives that he encountered during his field research. Using a pun on

“function”, Spicer dissects the functions that drinking plays in the community and analyzes how alcohol use interferes with the functioning of Indian people in economic and social spheres. Spicer examines this ambivalence through an analysis of the reasons that some people drink, others abstain, and many want to do both.

Spicer was surprised to learn that both drinkers and abstainers argued against the idea of a moderate Indian drinker; although he had originally intended to compare and contrast moderate and problem drinkers, he found that all his consultants—drinkers and abstainers alike—described Indian alcohol use as problematic. Therefore, he focused his analysis on how alcohol affects relationships with other Indian people, concluding that alcohol has both a “pull” that establishes a sense of interconnectedness among drinkers through the creation and maintenance of bonds of reciprocity, kinship, and hospitality. In contrast, drinking also results in a “push” that leads to the destruction of relationships. For example, alcohol use may hinder socially expected relationships with children and elders. These two paradoxical characterizations of alcohol use result in “a profound contradiction between the social connectedness found in the drinking group and the social fragmentation that often accompanies drunkenness, and American Indian drinkers are often painfully aware of this dilemma” (Spicer 1997:311-312). People are aware of this paradox, yet they continue to drink instead of seeking to curb the drinking that contributes to social discord.

To account for these conflicting views of alcohol, Spicer’s theoretical framework links tribal history with the political economy of Indian drinkers, similar to Singer’s historical analysis of economic changes that prompted shifts in drinking patterns. Spicer expanded his research beyond the conventional disease model of addiction to demonstrate how contemporary unemployment resonates with a sense of historical disempowerment,

particularly among his male consultants. Noting that drinkers regretted their inability to maintain employment, Spicer argues that “there seemed to be more at issue than mere dollars” (1997:315). Similar to how Singer, et al (1992) found that Puerto Rican men were driven to drink in reaction to a sense of inadequate expression of manhood, Spicer argues that “[t]he ability to keep a job and to support or at least contribute to one’s family were understood as marks of a mature man, and men who continued to drink saw themselves as failures in their communities and as weak or nonexistent members of their families” (1997:315-316). Spicer’s consultants linked their current perceptions of powerlessness with a sense of historical oppression of Indian people. They claimed that Indian men are more disempowered by the modern American economy than Indian women. This perceived disadvantage locates Indian drinking as act in reaction to a historical progression of subjugation.

CHAPTER THREE

The Political Economy of White Eagle: Historical, Economic, and Environmental Disruption

A Ponca history spanning from contact to the present reveals several themes: loss of land, separation from kin, environmental degradation, and disruption of Ponca political and economic systems (Howard 1995). A brief discussion of Ponca history demonstrates the long historical trajectory of disempowerment to which proponents of both discourses refer. Singer's (1992) understanding of male reactions to unemployment and changes in the political economy help explain why one group sees their survival of Chilocco as yet another event in a timeline of continual Ponca reactions to European or American incursion, while the other perceives that Chilocco represents another violent challenge to the Ponca Tribe.

A peaceful, nomadic tribe who followed the buffalo for their main staple, the Ponca encountered Europeans in 1789 and signed their first treaty with the United States in 1817. After the tribe was removed from their Nebraska homeland to Indian Territory, Oklahoma in 1877, a third of the tribe fled back to Nebraska.³ The bulk of the Poncas remained to become the Ponca Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma. These Poncas experienced geographic displacement to Oklahoma and social separation from their northern Ponca kin.

³ Dissatisfied with their reservation, this group cited an earlier treaty that guaranteed their right to remain in Nebraska. The federal government ignored this treaty, and the US Army arrested and detained the group at Fort Omaha. Standing Bear, a Ponca Chief and the leader of the Nebraska exodus Standing Bear, received pro bono legal counsel and filed suit for a writ of habeas corpus in what became *United States ex rel. Standing Bear v. Crook*. The Supreme Court subsequently decided in favor of Standing Bear, concluding that Indians are indeed persons within the law and capable of bringing suit. This landmark case freed the incarcerated Poncas, who remained in Nebraska to form the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska.

Dispossession of land, geographic isolation, and disruption of traditional and important winter camps continued in Oklahoma. Per the General Allotment Act of 1887, the Ponca reservation was divided into individual 160 acre parcels in order to eradicate tribal communal land bases and promote individual farming. When one third of the tribe refused to cooperate with this act, the federal government punished the holdouts by selecting detached allotments and ensuring that family members did not receive adjacent allotments (Ponca Tribal Website 2009). Many consultants drove me to places where they believe their grandparents or great-grandparents once lived in clustered camps. This act resulted in a geographic “checker board”, so named because the federal government sold reservation land in excess of the allotments to white settlers. A mix of individual Indian allotment and privately owned land belonging to white settlers and oil companies replaced contiguous Ponca land. One consultant, Jimmy, quipped that the General Allotment Act was “just another example of dividing and conquering us”. The tribal website agrees with this disruptive characterization of allotment, arguing that the allotment system proved a challenge to the maintenance of communal Ponca winter camps, during which people gathered to renew their collective tribal identity. Notably, Jimmy connects allotment to a larger project of attempted Ponca division—a theme that many consultants heartily emphasized when discussing the second, reactionary Chilocco discourse.

Economic disempowerment and environmental degradation followed geographic dislocation, after the oil boon hit Ponca lands. In 1899, the tribe leased reservation land to the Miller Brothers, who founded the famous tourist attraction, the 101 Ranch, which featured Wild West Shows. Their entrepreneurial enterprises expanded to oil in 1908. In 1911, oilman E. W. Marland struck oil on the Ponca allotment belonging to Willie

Cries-For-War, which Marland leased in exchange for a \$1,000 annual payment and 12.5 cents per barrel royalty. This well, which remained in operation until 1976, marked the founding the Marland Oil Company, which boasted an \$85 million valuation and control of 10% of the world's oil in 1920 (Mathews 1951). Later renamed the Continental Oil Company (Conoco), the company merged with Phillips Petroleum Corp. in 2002 to form ConocoPhillips, the sixth largest private sector energy corporation in the world. The Ponca Tribe, the City of Ponca City, and the PACE labor union are currently suing the energy giant for the alleged illegal release of carbon black, an airborne substance that has polluted the Arkansas River running through White Eagle and dirtied the air in their tribal community.

Environmental contamination, however, is not a recent phenomenon solely attributable to the Continental Oil Company factory; the tribal website writes that “the event that resulted in an irreversible change within Ponca culture appears to be the end of the communal winter camps brought about indirectly by the pollution of the Arkansas River” caused by over half a century of dumping of toxic oil waste from the refinery and Ponca City's raw sewage century (Ponca Tribal Website 2009). Environmental degradation, prompted by industry and a non-Indian town, stopped this major Ponca event. During my visits to White Eagle, Poncas enjoyed driving me around and telling stories about the winter camps, pointing to a specific tree and describing how their grandparents had camped near there. Yet, their descriptions of tents, boiling pots of food (such as tripe), stories, songs, and games generally ended with a glance, hand gesture, shake of the head, or point with the lips towards the polluted Arkansas River. Poncas are well aware of their historical dislocation, as well as the current dispossession in their own lands.

Over the span of approximately two hundred and twenty years, the Ponca tribe

experienced massive political and economic turmoil, resulting in their physical displacement to Oklahoma lands that are being exploited by an international corporation. The Ponca economy stands in marked contrast to the immense wealth generated by wells on their former reservation land. White Eagle is the main Ponca community, a small settlement consisting of approximately twenty homes in the town center, most of them small, single story Housing and Urban Development (HUD) structures. The other main Ponca community is Marland, named after the oil baron. Small grass plots in front of each home dot White Eagle. It is a misnomer to mention backyards, because small backyard plots melt into the grassy southern plains, sunflowers speckled throughout the long grasses and grains growing wild. Dirt, gravel, or paved roads are the main thoroughfares throughout the country. While the tribal jurisdictional area (commonly referred to as the Ponca reservation) is much larger, White Eagle proper consists of the HUD homes, tribal office, tribal bingo hall, community center, and wellness center complete with a gymnasium. The surrounding area is home to several other tribes, each of which has a town center similar to White Eagle, which is approximately twenty minutes away from Ponca City, the largest city in the county with a predominately white population of 26,000 as of the 2000 Census. The White Eagle economy is very depressed, with the majority of employment opportunities at the tribal bingo hall, tribally run offices, or seasonal work at ConocoPhillips. Deer and other wildlife are still commonly seen in this rural area, which poses a problem for motorists, and the Ponca Tribe also owns a herd of buffalo in a nod to their ancestral tradition of migratory hunting.

In White Eagle, the mean income for an American Indian⁴ was just under \$11,000,

⁴ The 2005 Census income data does not break down the racial category of “American Indian” into tribal affiliations, although it is reasonable to assume that the majority of American Indians in White Eagle are Ponca. Educational data did include tribal affiliation.

compared to \$29,000 for a white person in nearby Ponca City (United States Census Bureau 2005). In terms of education, thirty-three percent of Poncas achieved a high school diploma or equivalent. Fifty-five individuals, or roughly four percent of the entire tribe, held a bachelor's degree; only fifteen people, or one percent, achieved a graduate degree (United States Census Bureau 2005). These figures compare to eighty-three percent of non-Indians with a high school degree and twenty-two percent of non-Indians with a bachelors or higher degree in the surrounding area (United States Census Bureau 2005). Epidemiological consideration of these statistics argues that these educational and economic disparities place White Eagle residents at high risk for alcoholism and alcohol abuse, particularly because people with lower rates of education are less likely to be competitive in the paltry job market (Rhoades 2000:132-133).

Despite these troubling numbers—and epidemiological arguments that equate alcoholism with socioeconomic disparities—not all Poncas drink. Yet, male Poncas describe the political economy of their community as a hopeless one. Poncas are keenly aware of the disparities in their community, and many perceive a continual trajectory of power decline (of which Chilocco is the latest event). Men in particular would often explode in rage and gesture to oil wells a mere dozen yards from their small homes, angry that what could have been their oil is being pumped from what is seen as “their” land to fund an industry that, in turn, pollutes their water and air. This environmental disempowerment is perhaps the most visible sign of continual colonialism, as the enormous ConocoPhillips factory is impossible to miss on the flat prairie horizon. The company, however, generally refuses to offer Indians full time employment; a few Poncas—primarily women—hold seasonal jobs, primarily as safety observers who sit in a chair next to a phone and observe full time employees at work.

Their sole duty is to call for help should the typically non-Indian worker need emergency assistance. Many Poncas sarcastically described this job as the “Tonto job”, referencing the Lone Ranger’s sidekick Tonto, an idiotic character who seldom uttered polysyllabic words. I often heard Ponca women would crack jokes about this job and bitterly acknowledge that the company prefers to hire several Poncas seasonally rather than one Ponca full time to avoid giving health insurance or benefits. Nonetheless, they acknowledge that some employment is better than none. Their part time employment in this economy, however, prompted chortles of contempt from their husbands, partners, or families who are contemptuous of the menial factory job. No Ponca men who I interviewed had ever worked at the factory.

It is reasonable to think that opinions about suitable employment may stem from the vocational, academic, and social environment of Chilocco. When my consultants attended the school, Chilocco Indian School instructed students from over 126 tribes in curricula reflective of Progressive Era reformers’ idealized gender roles; in addition to academic study, boys participated in vocational training and competitive sports, while girls received the “domestic education” befitting an American housewife. Ponca alumnae describe how they encountered a strict atmosphere of military regimentation and bodily regulation, such as the documentation of menstruation and personal hygiene. Chilocco also utilized child labor to maintain the school. Students served as cooks, janitors, and groundskeepers; women often noted that they had scarce free time. Many male and female consultants alike confided that they experienced, witnessed, or knew students who were physically, emotionally, or sexually abused by matrons, instructors, or administrators as punishment for alleged failings in their vocational performance or academic training.

Poncas are divided on the usefulness of the skills they acquired at Chilocco. Older

alumni usually started conversations with a discussion of how both Ponca traditional culture and Chilocco curricula emphasize that the role of the man is to protect and provide for his community. With allotment effectively ending communal land holdings and Chilocco attendance later removing children, Poncas became geographically isolated from each other and the larger tribal group. While at Chilocco, Ponca men learned about farming and various trades, including mechanic, wood crafter, and janitor. The idea of farming on extremely small prairie land plots and the prospect of utilizing trade skills in an enormously depressed economy with few cars, no lumber resources, and less than five buildings requiring janitorial service borders on the absurd. One Ponca man described the vocational program to me, maintaining that curricula were geared towards further disbursement of tribal members: “Chilocco taught us jobs that are not useful on the rez. The teachers just wanted us to move into the towns or cities and away from the Ponca people.” Girls, however, received instruction in household skills, including cooking, cleaning, sewing, and canning—all activities that are relevant in the White Eagle community. This analysis of political economy suggests one reason that alumnae can find utility in their Chilocco experience, while many older male alumni disagree counter that Chilocco education and the political economy both hinder expressions of manliness—measured by Ponca and white standards. Next, I add theory from the anthropology of education that provides another explanatory model for rejection of Chilocco ideas about alcohol abuse, and I argue that my research illustrates how no single theory is likely to encompass the diverse underpinnings, motivations, and factors behind the contested discourses in White Eagle.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Anthropology of Education and Implications for American Indians

Questions about the impact of historical subjugation, contemporary socioeconomic disempowerment, and educational experiences framed the thirty year career of the late John Ogbu, a Nigerian immigrant and anthropologist of education. In 1972, Ogbu related perceived subjugation with the creation of subjectivities that influence performance and attitudes towards the American educational system through membership in a “voluntary minority” or an “involuntary, or caste-like, minority” group. Voluntary minorities are people who immigrate to the United States by choice and retain their cultural identities from their countries of origin. Involuntary minorities include African-Americans, American Indians, Mexican-Americans, and Puerto Ricans who were incorporated into the American state via slavery, colonization, or conquest, contexts which foster the reactionary development of identities located in opposition to a white American identity. Ogbu and his colleagues spent over three decades researching the perceived impact of these categories and developed the oppositional culture component of cultural-ecological theory. Ogbu argued that “what goes on inside the classroom and school is greatly affected by the minority group’s perceptions of and responses to schooling, and that is related to its historical and structural experience in the larger society” (Ogbu 1990:145). Similar to how Singer (1992) and Spicer (1998) analyze alcohol abuse within a historical context, Ogbu sought to understand why many African-American and American Indian students reject American education as a “white” environment

in which they cannot succeed.

Ogbu argued that involuntary minority students are affected by the phenomenon of “cultural inversion”, which is “the tendency for involuntary minorities to regard certain forms of behavior, events, symbols, and meanings as inappropriate for them because these are characteristic of White Americans” (Ogbu 1992:8). Some minority students invert educational ideology and refuse to adopt “white” educational behavior or even attend “white” schools, because they see the “white” education system as an oppositional force. Ogbu’s argument is not uniformly borne out when applied to the experiences of my Ponca consultants. The first discourse seems to support the “voluntary minority” strategy of “accommodation without assimilation”, a strategy whereby students identify “white” ideology as different and accept it without effecting fundamental change to their non-white cultural background (Gibson 1988, Mehan, et al 1994). The discourse advocating personal responsibility to solve a Ponca problem of alcohol abuse fits the definition of this response. In contrast, the second Ponca discourse does seem to support Ogbu’s theory that the Ponca involuntary minority group views Chilocco in a negative, even violent light, because it was a “white” institution that changed Poncas for the worse. The salient derivation from my research, however, is that Poncas respond in divergent ways. As sociologist Prudence L. Carter argues, Ogbu’s monolithic view of involuntary cultural inversion discounts the possibility of American Indian accommodation without assimilation. She criticizes his research for categorizing “‘involuntary minority groups’ as if their members were exactly the same. There are no single explanations for how so called involuntary minorities respond to the belief that middle- and upper-class Whites control the institutions of opportunity” (Carter 2005:7-8). Next, this paper extracts and analyzes the two, very different ways that

Poncas perceive the impact of Chilocco on their community and on personal choice, specifically about alcohol abuse, in order to show that any given group is undoubtedly going to disagree about alcohol control and Chilocco, particularly when the political economy may differently influence community members and create the possibility of a Ponca “voluntary minority” subjectivity.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Chilocco did change us, taught us new ways of acting”: Personal Responsibility for Alcohol Use

An exploration of the common sense of individual determination over one's use of alcohol demonstrates how some Ponca women grapple with the aftermath of their Chilocco experience. As Patricia Zavella (1991) cautions, not all women in a particular culture or community subscribe to identical viewpoints, and Ponca women are no different. The widespread, similar application of ideas about individualism in the fight against alcohol abuse among Ponca alumnae of the same generation, however, indicates similar responses are influenced by the Chilocco experience. Thus, Zavella's call for an analysis of “the historically specific structural conditions constraining women's experiences [in order to demonstrate] how the varieties of ways in which women respond to and construct cultural representations of their own experience” is an extremely productive way of discerning how childhood Chilocco instruction affects current Ponca attitudes towards responsible alcohol use and dangerous alcohol abuse (1991:313). Ponca narratives describe how the particular historical Chilocco experience instilled a feeling of empowerment through individual responsibility. Ponca women may apply this mentality to alcohol use, which shows that a Ponca appropriation of the American ideal of personal responsibility can constitute a stance aimed at ensuring their children and grandchildren do not fall into the trap of alcohol abuse and various related issues, such as domestic and other violence, car accidents, unemployment, homelessness, and health concerns. Perhaps this grappling is the best

evidence that boarding schools failed in the quest for creation of an assimilated body that rejects any connections with the Ponca past in favor of American integration.

Many Poncas poignantly described how their deep ambivalence towards the school facilitated the development of the “survivor” subjectivity. By overcoming individual challenges, students fostered a sense of tribal pride in continual perseverance in the face of American cultural hegemony. Ponca alumnae responses to alcohol abuse aptly prove that “although boarding schools were ‘total institutions’, students were not merely passive victims of institutional routine and cultural hegemony” (Adams 2006:56). My interviews with Ponca women in their fifties and sixties revealed that despite women’s deep ambivalence toward the school, ideas of individual responsibility and self-reliance did resonate. Candice, a woman in her mid 50’s, contends that:

“Chilocco taught me to be a survivor. We as Ponca people have had to survive a lot in our history. My great-grandparents came to Oklahoma from up north. They were sent here to the rez, and they survived here by living in camps, tents. So Chilocco, it was another removal. They tried to make us into white people, teach us skills to live in towns like Ponca City or Wichita, Oklahoma City or wherever, and speak English, which was good in the long run. Chilocco did change us, taught us new ways of acting. Everything was very orderly, lots of rules. We were with Indians from all different tribes and had to speak English with each other, but we are still here as the Ponca people.”

Candice’s description of Chilocco is representative of other narratives I heard; Candice describes the issue of language loss arising from an intertribal student body united through the mutually foreign English language, but she also frames her narrative as a distinctively Ponca story. She stresses that their survival of Chilocco is merely another step in a long history of responses to military action, removal, or federal policy. She notes that her ancestors survived a much harder experience—denial of adequate provisions in tent camps in the harsh Oklahoma climate—and she describes attendance at Chilocco as “another

removal”. This argument functions literally, as children were taken from homes, and symbolically, as she recognizes the assimilationist intent to “make [Poncas] into white people”.

Candice explains that Chilocco used order and regimentation to instruct students in the skills, both social, physical, linguistic, and occupational, necessary to live in the mainstream American world. Nonetheless, Candice heartily emphasizes that survival is primarily nationalist, affirming that “we are still here as the Ponca people”, as opposed to adopting either a generic, intertribal Indian identity or an assimilated, white identity. Her school experience actually created her survivor subjectivity and established her survivor solidarity with Ponca forbearers.

Most Chilocco alumnae of Candice’s generation agreed that childhood regulation of comportment influenced their ideas about adult behavior. Clare describes how: “everything was on a schedule, eating, waking up, chores, going to sleep, bathing, anything you can think of had a time attached to it!” This compartmentalized sense of time extended to individuated senses of identity. Clare argues that “Chilocco tried to teach us to be individuals. Here in White Eagle, as you can tell we have big families. We are all responsible for each other. You can find anyone to watch your kids! At Chilocco...I couldn’t depend on my family to do things. It was all up to me.” Yet, Clare ultimately praises individual responsibility:

“Well, of course it was hard not being around my family. But I really like some of the ideas about handling things yourself. At Chilocco, we had responsibilities we had to do, chores, homework, lights out. We knew what each student had to do. Now, I know Chilocco did that to keep the school orderly...but...I have learned that you can count on yourself to do what you have to do, fix your own problems, which makes you proud. There is nothing wrong in admitting you have a problem, like with alcohol. It’s *nothing* to be ashamed of, because no one is perfect. You just have to work at it, because you can help yourself and handle alcohol better.”

Clare argues that the instillation of order and regimentation in the Chilocco boarding school atmosphere resulted in the development of personal responsibility. Upon completion of her designated tasks, Clare developed a sense of pride from “counting on [herse]f to do what [she had] to do”. She expands this responsibility to include appropriate use of alcohol, saying that if a person has a problem with alcohol, he or she should not be ashamed. Acknowledging that “no one is perfect”, Clare instead argues that the process of addressing a problem leads to personal development. She exemplifies her idea of personal responsibility through a narrative about her own personal successes at school.

Clare concludes her argument with the disclosure that she, too, has been concerned about her drinking:

“Sure, oh sure, there have been times when I partied too much. I was embarrassed to go around my kids drunk. I would leave them with my mom, my sister, for a day, couple of days. That’s not right. They are my kids, and I want to teach them that there’s another way. I work hard to handle alcohol if I drink it, and not have it control me. I remember about the books, tests, at Chilocco and how at first, I thought I could never get through [it]. It seemed like *so* much work, but I did it. I want to teach my kids that they can do it too. I want to show them that alcohol doesn’t have to control us as Ponca people.”

Women such as Clare imbue their narratives with authority by noting that they, too, have struggled with alcohol abuse. Clare specifically identifies Chilocco as the place where she learned to tackle big problems. For a seven year old away from home, attending class in an unfamiliar language, completion of a textbook or exam would indeed seem to be a daunting task. Clare, however, was able to achieve this goal, and her resulting sense of accomplishment seems to have inspired her to “teach [her] kids that they can do it too”.

They can live a life free from the “control” of alcohol, one with socially acceptable drinking rather than problem drinking. Ponca alumnae construe their Chilocco experience as another

challenge to their Ponca existence; they feel empowered as “survivors” and draw strength from the long history of Ponca adaptation to American intrusion. These women argue that individual responsibility can empower Poncas and foster satisfaction in personal achievement. This reaction indicates that boarding school survival necessitated the embrace of some Chilocco ideas that students perceived as both positive and practical.

“Just brown [skinned] white people”: Rejection of Chilocco Ideology

Other Ponca Chilocco male alumni in their fifties and sixties join their younger Ponca children and grandchildren of both generations to articulate an oppositional discourse that argues the incorporation of Chilocco ideology is dangerous and against the Ponca way of life. This viewpoint generally focuses on the negative aspects of Chilocco’s educational removal. Consultants, many of them men in their fifties to sixties, identified Chilocco’s mission as the creation of white, assimilated Indians. They also lamented how the educational removal of students indelibly affected their tribe.

Many older alumni, as well as their children and grandchildren, perceived that student enrollment in Indian boarding schools prevents participation in male coming of age rituals, ceremonies, and tribal societies. The important Ponca Hethuska society is open to all Ponca men who have undergone necessary training and preparation. This discourse argued that Chilocco attendance impacted future generations of Poncas, as men who are denied the ability to participate in Hethuska upon their return from boarding school will likewise be unable to instruct their children in coming of age and Hethuska society. Several children of alumni wistfully described how frustrating it is to lack fathers or uncles to induct them into this society.

Consultants also blamed the history of white incursion for the disappearance of the Ponca Sun Dance. Jimmy bemoaned the reality that a Ponca Sun Dance had not been held in his lifetime, and he described how several Ponca men had made a journey to their Omaha tribal relatives in Nebraska to re-learn the proper way to conduct this key ceremony. The Ponca tribal website attributes the decline of the Sun Dance (last held in the 1910's) to allotment, which caused a break in the clan system based on the communal camp circle (2009). The ultimate cessation of the Sun Dance was prompted by its evolution into "somewhat of a tourist attraction for non-Indian[,] and excursion trains from Ponca City were scheduled for those who wanted to view the ceremony" (Ponca Tribal Website 2009). In reaction to the attempted commodification of their most sacred dance and the decline of communal land holdings, the Poncas stopped the dance. Although the Sun Dance's decline happened before the era of Chilocco, some Poncas see a situation analogous with the decreasing involvement in the Hethuska. Jimmy worries about whether enough interested young men are available in White Eagle "so that the Hethuska doesn't go the way of the Sun Dance, because our Hethuska, our Man Dance or Warrior Dance as it's called in English, That remains our main way to come together as Poncas." Jimmy then joked, "how embarrassing would it be for us to have to borrow it from the Omahas?" Although he concluded his narrative on a humorous note, his concern reflects the very real and serious impact of loss of culturally knowledgeable Ponca men.

Poncas frequently told me that when Chilocco removed students from their families, it created several generations of Ponca adults who cannot pass on traditional practices to their children. Consultants often argued that Chilocco created "white Poncas"; as one older man in his sixties wryly remarked, "they tried to take away our language and our culture. We

could not speak Ponca. It was forbidden. Without that, we are just brown [skinned] white people”. This evocative quote succinctly represents this discourse of antagonism toward Chilocco, arguing that the school’s ideas are antagonistic to Ponca practices. A further issue complicating acceptance of any Chilocco ideology is the argument that Poncas who returned often dressed differently from their peers, disrupting their peer group. John, the son of a fifty-five year old Chilocco alumna who also attended the school, derided the educational experience at Chilocco. He described how his vocabulary and manner of speaking changed at school:

“because they, the teachers, would try to make you talk like them, not like on the rez. I didn’t listen to them because I didn’t wanna act better than my family, than my Ponca people...I didn’t wanna become a white boy.”

Anthropologists and historians of boarding schools corroborate John’s narrative of tension, particularly when children returned home (Child 1993; Bloom 2000; Keller 2000). The isolation from family members, extended kinship structures, and tribal networks precipitated by boarding schools sometimes resulted in student confusion. Because they were away from their families and tribal communities, boarding school students were not inculcated with many Ponca norms and did easily reincorporate into the tribal community. Traditional cultural norms of parenting were effectively “limited...for several generations. Students segregated from their tribal communities during their formative years are at a risk to not understand “spiritual traditions, communications practices, mate-selection criteria, parenting standards, and courting traditions” (Kawamoto 2001:1484). Instead, adults who lived through the boarding school experience brought back corporeal punishment and the cold, shaming communication techniques that were modeled to them by their boarding school teachers (Kawamoto 2001).

Other Poncas are enraged by Chilocco's physical punishment. Many younger Poncas are hostile when alumnae in their fifties and sixties talk about their experiences and sense of pride stemming from individualism. John is critical of his mother's ambivalence towards Chilocco. Disapproval of physical violence strongly influences a disregard for Chilocco ideology. With confusion in his voice, he rhetorically asked me "how she can think it was good at all when she got paddled all the time? Tell me how that's a good place with any good ideas!" John expressed surprise and incredulity that his mother could praise a Chilocco ideology in light of extensive physical discipline. Keith, a young Ponca in his early twenties, argued that perception of his grandparents' experience at Chilocco influenced him to drop out. When I asked him why he was no longer enrolled in a boarding school in southwest Oklahoma, he told me that:

"They told me they got beat [by instructors.]...My mom ran off because she said my grandma would beat her. I don't want to be like that so I stay here and take care of myself....I don't need school...I don't want to grow up and treat my kids like that. I think boarding schools are, well, cause harm to our tribe. Because they [instructors] are very physical which I don't think is legal in public schools."

Keith believed that his grandparents' experience of corporal punishment proves that boarding schools "cause harm to [his] tribe". He connects his mother's abandonment with the physical punishment that his grandmother learned at Chilocco. Keith concludes that boarding schools instruct improper parenting techniques, which results in familial strife. His attitude resonated with three male Ponca alumni in their fifties and early sixties, who freely condemned Chilocco's behavioral modification as "violent white ways", "physical abuse, not teaching", or "forced adoption [enlistment] into the Army". I was surprised by repetition of violence, force, and "white" American imagery.

Blame for physical abuse into the community, anger at loss of ceremonial practices,

and the feeling that Chilocco was overwhelmingly violent provide evidence for the argument that Chilocco's ideology of personal responsibility is not an appropriate method of addressing alcohol abuse. Chilocco aimed to create assimilated, white Poncas; maintenance or recovery of lost traditions (such as the Sun Dance) necessitates a complete break from Chilocco. Contrary to the discourse propounded by advocates of personal responsibility for alcohol consumption, other Poncas argue that Chilocco broke down the family structure that should have regulated alcohol use. The family, not the school, is imbued with the responsibility to instruct children, and alcohol abuse results when boarding schools disrupt the intergenerational instruction process. Jimmy, a man in his mid-thirties whose mother attended Chilocco, was a student at Concho Indian Boarding School for several years. After his brief tenure, he missed being around extended family and argues that "It is the family's job to teach their kids and grandchildren. A school can never do that. About the alcohol abuse problem, well a lot of [Poncas] just can't handle themselves, they never learned how to, never learned from their families, their parents." His sister Beth defined problematic drinking as occurring when people have not learned to "handle themselves" in their social and familial environment. She agreed with Jimmy's comment that people need to learn from their parents supports Ponca women's narratives that their children need instruction in appropriate drinking; yet, it does not place the locus of responsibility on the individual. I asked her opinion on individual responsibility, and she laughed, saying its "ridiculous." She expounded on her views, questioning:

"How is any one person going to learn to drink responsibly? Let me tell you, they're not going to from Chilocco! You have to understand that boarding schools do not teach you to think, but just train you like you train a dog. A dog is afraid of being hit so it does what he's told. White teachers do not want you to think about what's good for you in this world of ours, including with alcohol. [You] just to do what you're

told and not ask questions. Stay in line. [Pause]. There's no room for individual choice in that kind of scenario."

This narrative encapsulates the concerns with the first discourse; she grounds his critique in the violence seen as inherent component of the boarding school training process, and she rejects the possibility that boarding schools provide a space for serious intellectual consideration. Her vivid analogy of dog training emphasizes his feeling that boarding schools wanted to teach students to "stay in line" and follow instruction due to a fear of physical punishment. Beth genuinely seemed bewildered that some alumnae proffer an ideology of personal choice in "that kind of scenario".

CHAPTER SIX

Contested Discourses, Dynamic Responses

A critical medical anthropological analysis of the history and political economy of the Ponca Tribe exposes a long trajectory of responses to white incursion. Poncas have responded in different ways to the challenges presented by the political, economic, and cultural incorporation of the Ponca Tribe into the American state. Because drinking is a contentious activity—one that is uniformly acknowledged as capable of leading to major tragedy and health problems—varying reactions to drinking illustrate how the Ponca political economy and boarding school experiences impact discursive suggestions about handling alcohol. I emphasize how one group identifies connections between the adoption of individual determinism at Chilocco and its application to alcohol use. This dynamic approach to perceptions of problem drinking shows how some Ponca alumnae adopt the American idea of individual determinism to support fellow Poncas, even though assimilationist educators expected individualism would break apart tribalism. These women negotiate the impact of their educational experience with the goal of deriving a useful idea, and they encourage children and grandchildren to drink responsibly, in a moderate fashion. I also consider the alternate discourse that condemns Chilocco and its ideas as one of many attempts at total assimilation. Male alumni of the same generation may be differently affected by a sense of unemployment and disempowerment, yet their idea resonates with younger Poncas of both genders who feel that the educational removal to Chilocco did, in fact, constitute a serious attack on the tribal community. Discussion of these two discourses

about how to cope with alcohol abuse, and why some people cannot do so, powerfully demonstrates how the Ponca response to assimilationist techniques is not the uniform adoption, but rather the active contestation of controversial tactics.

This research indicates that the structure and discipline at Chilocco failed to totally assimilate tribes. While not all Poncas agree, both responses demonstrate an enduring spirit of engagement with what is perceived as the best way to help their community. This survivor subjectivity contrasts with the boarding school goal of molding new Americans removed from tribal ties, so perhaps some Ponca women see their appropriation of individual responsibility to ensure safe alcohol use as the ultimate form of strengthening a ruptured tribal community recovering from the boarding school educational removal. Others, meanwhile, conclude that the most effective method of Ponca nation building is the total rejection of Chilocco and the strengthening of the family by keeping children at home. Thus, the two disparate discourses advocate for a model that promotes strength rather than helplessness, and tribal empowerment over assimilation.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF CONSULTANTS

Beth

Beth is in her early thirties and an alumna of an Indian boarding school. She is Jimmy's sister, and she agrees that boarding schools are diametrically opposed to Ponca ideals.

Candice

Candice is a Chilocco alumna in her late fifties. She describes her experience at boarding school as a formative experience analogous to historical Ponca removals. She identifies as a boarding school survivor.

Clare

Clare is a Chilocco alumna in her mid-fifties. Clare identified herself as a problem drinker who frequently abuses alcohol. She wants the community to discuss alcohol abuse and described her reluctance to be around her children while intoxicated.

Jimmy

Jimmy is a man in his early thirties. An alumnus of Concho Indian boarding school and one of the tribe's few college graduates, Jimmy was my liaison to the Ponca community. He described his life as faced with challenges from poor parenting, acknowledged that he succumbed to alcohol and marijuana abuse, and overcame these problems to effect change for future Ponca generations.

John

John is a thirty-eight year old Ponca. He attended Chilocco and bitterly complained about assimilated "white" Indians who were changed by the boarding school experience.

Keith

Keith is in his early twenties. He dropped out of boarding school in fear that attending would cause him to become an alcohol abuser like his mother and grandparents. Keith believes that one cannot be a traditional Ponca in a "violent" boarding school environment.

Shawna

Shawna is in her fifties. Shawna is the mother of Jimmy, Beth, and Gilbert. Sober for four years, Shawna recounted the tragedy of her sister Karen's death in an automobile accident and condemns Poncas who refuse to blame the intoxicated driver for his actions.

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